



CEO Update

Agenda Item 6

National Park Authority Board Meeting

15th March 2021

Paper for information

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1. Purpose

1.1. The purpose of this paper is to provide the Board with important updates on significant issues affecting the operating environment of the National Park Authority which are not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

2. Recommendation

2.1. Members are requested to note the contents of the report.

3. Scottish Government

3.1. The Convener and CEO met with the **new Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment**, Ben MacPherson in February. This introductory meeting covered a wide range of topics and provided an excellent opportunity to brief the Minister on the work of the National Park Authority and our plans for the coming year.

- 3.2. Both the Scottish Government Director and Deputy Director for Environment and Forestry, Bridget Campbell and Keith Connal with responsibility for National Parks are retiring in the coming weeks. The new Director will be Kevin Quinlan who takes up post in April. The Convener and CEO have already met with Kevin to brief him on the work of the National Park Authority. We will be wishing both Bridget and Keith well for their retirement.
- 3.3. The Scottish Government published its [Climate Change Plan Update](#) in December. This updates the 2018 Climate Change Plan with new policies and proposals to meet the increased ambition of Scottish Government climate change targets, set out in the 2019 Climate Change Act. These include a 75% reduction in emissions by 2030 (compared with 1990) and achieving net zero emissions by 2045.
- 3.4. The Climate Change Plan sets out the Scottish Governments approach to delivering a green recovery and includes over 100 new policies and proposals with focus on the period up to 2032.
- 3.5. Following on from the [2020-21 Programme for Government](#) the Climate Change Plan Update sets out the progress being made in delivering a green recovery. This has been framed around the following key themes:
 - 3.5.1. Investing to drive demand in the net zero economy
 - 3.5.2. Skills and training for good, green jobs
 - 3.5.3. Building our resilience as part of a green recovery
 - 3.5.4. Positive behaviour change
 - 3.5.5. Place-based approach
- 3.6. The National Park Authority will continue to identify where it can play a role in achieving targets both in reducing emissions as an organisation and enabling carbon reduction and sequestration in the National Park itself.
- 3.7. Members will recall that the Scottish Land Commission published recommendations to the Scottish Government on how best to take forward the concept of [Regional Land Use Partnerships](#) to drive a collaborative approach to land use decision making in the public interest and to prioritise and target delivery of public funding to achieve land use objectives. The National Park Authority expressed interest in being a pilot area to further explore how these partnerships could work. The Scottish Government has since confirmed Loch Lomond and The Trossachs as one of 5 pilot areas which will be taken forward this year. Further engagement with Scottish Government officials will explore how the pilot will be taken forward and how this work will be resourced. Work is expected to commence in the summer.

4. Climate Change Action Plan

4.1. Since 2019 we have reported to Board members annually in March on the progress with our current [Climate Change Action Plan](#). With the development of our new Mission Zero Route Map that Members endorsed at the December 2020 Board meeting, we envisage that the monitoring and reporting process for our climate work will change in the near future, but has yet to be mapped out by the project team. Along with our annual submission on climate-related performance to Scottish Government, we expect that with changing legislation there will be a need to report our climate duties as part of our Annual Report and Accounts process. As further detail emerges we will keep members updated on plans for reporting this high priority area of work.

5. COP26

5.1. With COP26 due to happen in Glasgow this November there is significant interest in holding various 'Green Zone' events alongside the main 'Blue Zone' summit to be held in the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre complex. With Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park being on the doorstep of the summit there is an excellent opportunity, and already considerable interest, in using the National Park to give a focus on the role of nature based solutions to tackling the climate emergency. An internal group is being set up to consider approaches already being made to involve the National Park Authority in proposed events.

5.2. An Expressions of Interest process is currently live to apply to the UK Government to hold Green Zone events. Loch Lomond and The Trossachs is part of a bid by all 15 UK National Parks to hold an event to highlight how protected landscapes are a national and international asset in the fight against climate change. It is hoped to assemble representatives of the international family of National Parks to highlight their transformative role in the fight against climate change. The opportunities for private finance to fund nature projects will also feature. The outcome of the bid is expected to be known by May. With the current COVID Pandemic situation and ongoing uncertainty over international travel, there will be contingencies to hold an online event if this is necessary.

5.3. Participation in COP26 events requires all participating organisations to sign up to [Race to Zero](#) which is a global campaign to rally leadership and support from businesses, cities, regions, investors for a healthy, resilient, zero carbon recovery that prevents future threats, creates decent jobs, and unlocks inclusive, sustainable growth. The objective is to build momentum around the shift to a decarbonized economy ahead of COP26, where governments must strengthen their contributions to the Paris Agreement. This is intended to demonstrate that business, cities, regions and investors are united in meeting the Paris goals and creating a more inclusive and resilient economy. It is intended that Loch Lomond and The Trossachs will sign up to Race to Zero alongside the other 14 UK National Parks.

6. Biodiversity Duty Report - Tackling threats to Biodiversity in the National Park

- 6.1. In January 2021, we submitted a report to Scottish Government detailing the actions that the National Park Authority has carried out over the last 3 years (2018-2020) to further the conservation of biodiversity under the conditions set out in the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act (2004) – our Biodiversity Duty Report.
- 6.2. The full report which was published on our website and can be found [here](#), extends to over 40 pages and is brigaded into the 7 themes from [Scotland's Biodiversity Strategy](#): Healthy Ecosystems; Natural Capital; Biodiversity, Health and Quality of Life; Wildlife, Habitats and Protected Sites; Land and Freshwater Management; Marine and Coastal; and Measuring Progress.
- 6.3. Much of the work that the National Park Authority carries out sits across these themes. Whilst the Conservation & Land Management Team deliver much of the work, many of the other teams with the National Park Authority contribute toward conservation and biodiversity projects, notably Planning & Development; Access, Health & Recreation; Volunteering & Education; Visitor Management; Tourism; as well as the Countryside Trust.
- 6.4. An executive summary of the report is found in Appendix 1

7. National Park Visitor Research 2019-2020

- 7.1. Members may recall the National Park commissioned visitor research in May 2019-April 2020 from the external agency, *Progressive*, to gain insight regarding visitor profile, behaviour and attitudes to support future planning and decision-making. The work was managed in tandem with the Cairngorms National Park to facilitate comparisons where relevant. The survey was conducted at 23 locations park-wide and secured budget contributions from Argyll & Bute and West Dunbartonshire Councils. The 12-month plan was cut short by Covid in March 2020 by when 2,265 face-to-face interviews had been achieved – a sufficiently significant sample size to be able to compare data and trends with the previous NPA visitor surveys of 2003/04, 2011(summer only), and 2015/16.
- 7.2. The final report was completed in December 2020 and the data is already being used by officers in relation to visitor management planning; tourism business engagement; performance monitoring of NPPP outcomes; and grant funding applications and evidence reporting, plus other applications. The data sits in the wider context of other research sources we use including VisitScotland Insight Reports; sector specific research (Camping research; ASVA etc); and our annual STEAM economic data reports. *Progressive* also conducted the recent STERG report on the impact of Covid-19 on the tourism industry.
- 7.3. The new data is all pre-coronavirus. Key Findings include some disappointing points of little change, for example in visitor transport choice (car); low level diversity/BAME; and almost 10% of all visitors reporting a long-term health

condition or disability (mostly mobility-related). Other Findings are fresh and may help us plan and manage with stakeholders how we emerge from Covid-19 in relation to our core principles. In particular, regarding Health & Well-being, 97% respondents agreed overall (base 2,265) and 61% agreed strongly that being in the Park improves one's mood and sense of well-being. Also, the evaluation ratings of all visitor facilities across the park increased; while the visitor age profile indicates fewer young people: a dip in 18-34yrs and a higher proportion in age groups 55+.

- 7.4. Another application of the data is our ability to 'mine it' to drill down into the 23 sampling areas to glean geo-specific visitor insight. Clearly the small sample sizes at individual locations do not give robust statistics but can still be used as indicators for projects and contribute to stakeholder discussions.
- 7.5. We are already sharing this data appropriately with external colleagues and the joint funders of the research project. We intend to publish the full report on our website this spring to be able to direct students, colleagues and public enquiries to the information.

8. West Highland Way

- 8.1. Members will recall that to coincide with the 40th Anniversary of the West Highland Way. LEADER funding was secured to employ a West Highland Way Development officer to help revamp how the route is promoted and managed. The role has made good progress on this development work. However, with LEADER funding coming to an end, the project has successfully secured new additional grant funding from NatureScot and VisitScotland totalling £34,500 towards the continuation of this important work towards the future sustainability of Scotland's premier Long Distance Route.

9. Appendix

Appendix 1 – Executive Summary of Biodiversity Duty Report 2018-20

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